Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Radio Service
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, January 6, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MOLASSES IN JANUARY." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

It's a slow cook who doesn't make the most of molasses in January -- or February, or any other winter month. For molasses is the "making" of many good dishes especially appetizing on a winter's day -- good old-time American dishes like hot spicy gingerbread just out of the oven, and Indian pudding, and hot steamed brown bread and baked beans. And then, molasses is a good fuel or energy food like other forms of sugar, but even better, it is rich in iron and calcium. And aren't we all interested in getting our iron and calcium quota these winter days?

Of course, you know that molasses is one of the good by-products of the manufacture of cane sugar. I don't know who first discovered that when raw sugar crystallizes from the sugar-cane juice, it leaves a "mother liquid" with its own special delicious flavor. And that liquid, clarified and concentrated, is molasses. I say I don't know who first discovered molasses but I do know that until that time no one had ever tasted a molasses cookie or piece of gingerbread or molasses taffy. I've been trying to trace the history of the word molasses. The dictionary says it comes to us from the French or Portugese but that it came originally from the earlier Latin word meaning sirup. In England, most people use the word treacle for the better grades of molasses.

And speaking of grades, molasses is graded according to the amount of sugar taken out of it. One grade goes by the name of "cooking molasses." That is less sweet -- contains less sugar -- than "table molasses." "Blackstrap" molasses is graded lowest because it contains the least sugar. But sugar is not the only important food value of molasses. And all grades contain the natural minerals in the cane juice. According to our present law, the word "molasses" on the label of any container means that the product inside must contain no more than 25 percent water.

Molasses is a favorite for making dark cakes, quick breads, steamed puddings and cookies, partly because of its characteristic flavor, partly for its color. And you'll notice that in all the molasses dishes, the recipe calls for soda along with the molasses. This is because molasses contains some acid, and that acid combined with soda produces a gas that helps to leaven the bread or cake. But this is not usually enough leaven for the whole mixture. So most good recipes also call for baking powder.

Molasses also is an old favorite for candy-making, especially for molasses taffy. Some taffy recipes call for soda along with the molasses, and some don't. Of course, you don't need leavening in candy. But it happens that the soda lightens the color of the candy mixture, and some people prefer that

lighter shade. On the other hand, many a good candy-maker will add no soda because she wants the natural acid of the molasses left in the mixture. That little bit of acid keeps the candy from crystallizing, or "sugaring".

One more point about molasses mixtures. They scorch easily. That's important to remember in baking gingerbread or molasses cookies, and especially in making gingerbread waffles.

Our grandmothers often used much more molasses in their cooking than we do. Several old favorites have been almost forgotten by present-day cooks. For example, there was molasses sauce which went with many old-time puddings. Our grandmothers made their molasses sauce with molasses, lemon juice, salt and butter. It is something like our more familiar butterscotch sauce, and you use it in the same way. It is good with cottage pudding, steamed fruit pudding, and even frozen mixtures.

Molasses pie was another old-timer. This is much like our present butterscotch pie -- a cornstarch custard filling sweetened and flavored with molasses with a little butter added. Molasses batter pudding -- that was a favorite among old-time steamed puddings. In general, it was a gingerbread mixture cooked in the steamer instead of being baked in the oven. Indian pudding is one of those mixtures that our pioneer grandmothers adopted from the best redskin cook in the neighborhood. It is a slowly-baked combination of cornmeal, milk, molasses, ginger, and salt.

Baked beans and brown bread is still the Saturday-night menu in New England. And if you like the old-time way of doing things, you'll season those beans with dark molasses before you bake them. And you'll use dark molasses in making your brown bread.

By the way, people often confuse another one of our sirups with molasses. This is sorgo sirup or sorghum sirup. Now and then you hear somebody speak of it as "sorghum molasses". This is a mistake. Molasses comes from the sugar cane. And sorghum sirup from the sorghum cane -- another plant entirely. But you can use sorghum successfully in any molasses recipe. In fact it has some advantages over molasses. It makes a delicious table sirup. And the sorghum food values are somewhat higher than the molasses food values -- more minerals, for one thing. This year sorghum sirup should be inexpensive because the crop was unusually large.

Well, I couldn't let the day go by without giving you the best recipe I know for gingerbread. Compare it with your own if you like. Or jot it down for safe keeping.

Altogether the ingredients number 12, and here they are: one-half cup of fat..... one-half cup of sugar..... 1 cup of molasses..... 1 egg..... 3 cups of sifted soft-wheat flour..... 4 teaspoons of baking powder..... one-half teaspoon of soda..... one-half teaspoon of salt..... 1 teaspoon of ginger..... one-half teaspoon of cloves..... one-half teaspoon of cinnamon..... and, 1 cup of milk.

You cream together the sugar and fat. That's the first step. Then you add the molasses and the beaten egg. Then you sift together twice the dry ingredients, and add them to the first mixture alternately with the milk. Bake in 2 shallow pans in a moderate oven -- about 350 degrees Fahrenheit -- for 30 or 40 minutes. And serve with cream cheese or whipped cream or apple sauce or anything else you like.

#####